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Epistemological Integration in Abū Rās al-Nāṣirī's (d. 1238 AH/1823 CE) Qur'anic Commentary al-Ibrīz wa-l-Iksīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr: Levels, Originality and Limits

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Abstract

This study examines how knowledge of the world (history, religions, genealogy, geography, nature, languages and social life) enters *al-Ibrīz wa-l-Iksīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, the Qur'anic commentary of the Algerian scholar Abū Rās al-Nāṣirī (d. 1238 AH/1823 CE), using Fathi Hasan Malkawī's three-level model of epistemological integration: sources, instruments, and sources with instruments. A full inventory of the edited text (al-Fātiḥah and al-Baqarah to verse 137) identified 72 loci, 68 of which bring non-revealed knowledge into the interpretation of a verse; the sources of 17 loci were traced and eight cases analysed. History is the most frequent field (45.6%), the level of sources predominates (79.4%), and most loci are unattributed (76.5%). Eleven of the twelve unattributed loci traced were found in earlier works, chiefly al-Bayḍāwī, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Juzayy and the *Jalālayn*. His integration is thus mainly consumptive, with productive moments in the historical criticism of exegetical opinions, the use of Ibn Khaldūn's concept of *'aṣabiyyah* to explain a Qur'anic term, and rational analogy. Tracing also shows that attribution does not guarantee the real source, that "I say" (*qultu*) may belong to another author, and that Ibn Khaldūn's criterion for testing numbers did not travel with his reports. The study draws implications for teaching *tafsīr*, notably training students to trace sources and to apply the verification criterion proper to each report.

Keywords: epistemological integration; Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*); Abū Rās al-Nāṣirī; *al-Ibrīz wa-l-Iksīr*; source criticism; sciences of human civilization (*'umrān*).

1. Introduction

The interpretation of the Qur'an has never been able to dispense with knowledge of the world. Narrative verses call for the history, genealogies and lands of past nations. Verses on creation call for what people knew of the heavens and the earth. Verses on the People of the Book call for knowledge of their religions and languages. Exegetes therefore drew on such knowledge, and critics warned against its hazards from early on. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808 AH/1406 CE) observed in the preface to his history that "historians, exegetes and leading transmitters have often erred in narratives and events because they relied on mere transmission, taking the lean with the fat (*ghaththan aw samīnan*)."¹ The question of how *tafsīr* relates to knowledge of the world is thus an old one, renewed in contemporary scholarship under the name of "epistemological integration" (*al-takāmul al-ma'rīfī*).

Abū Rās Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nāṣirī al-Mu'askarī (1150–1238 AH/1737–1823 CE)² is a fitting exegete to whom this question may be put. He was known as a historian and genealogist before he was known as an exegete. The editor of his commentary remarked that it was his "habit in this work to take historical reports from Imam Ibn Khaldūn, because the

¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 1, p. 13.

² Al-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, vol. 6, p. 18.

exegetes do not mention such precise details.”³ Of his commentary *al-Ibrīz wa-l-Iksīr fī ‘Ilm al-Tafsīr*, only al-Fātiḥah and al-Baqarah up to verse 137 survive.⁴ This portion contains the verses on creation, the story of Adam, the longest Qur’anic account of the Children of Israel, and the mention of Christians and Sabians. It is therefore a suitable field for testing how a historian’s knowledge enters an exegete’s work, and whether the historian’s standard of verification travels with it.

1.1 Research Problem and Questions

The study addresses one central question: to what extent does the entry of knowledge of the world into *al-Ibrīz* amount to epistemological integration, at the levels defined in contemporary scholarship? It also asks how much of this integration Abū Rās originated and how much he transmitted. Four sub-questions follow:

1. What kinds of knowledge not derived from revelation enter the commentary, and how are they distributed across fields and levels?
2. How does such knowledge function in interpreting verses, in cases representing the three levels of integration?
3. What did Abū Rās originate and what did he borrow, and from whom? Does his attribution, or his silence, reveal his actual source?
4. What are the limits of this integration, and what do the findings imply for teaching *tafsīr* today?

1.2 Significance and Rationale

The study matters for four reasons. Discussions of integration in the exegetical heritage often remain general, whereas this study applies explicit criteria, a full inventory and source tracing. *Al-Ibrīz*, the work of a historian and genealogist, is a natural test of whether a historian’s knowledge and standards pass into exegesis. This Algerian commentary of the Ottoman period, though edited in a master’s thesis and partly published, remains “obscure, seldom cited and little circulated.”⁵ Finally, distinguishing what an exegete originated from what he transmitted is both a precondition for judging his method and a skill that students of *tafsīr* need.

1.3 Objectives

The study aims to inventory every locus where knowledge of the world enters *al-Ibrīz* and classify it by field, level and authorial voice; to identify, through source tracing, the productive and consumptive dimensions of its integration and test the editor’s attributions; and to define the limits of this integration and its educational implications.

1.4 Previous Studies

A search of the Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP), academic search engines and Qur’anic-studies websites, followed by the references of the works found, yielded the following previous studies on this subject, in chronological order:

1. Khadijah Mūsūdaq, “Makḥṭūṭ *al-Ibrīz fī ‘Ilm al-Tafsīr* li-Abī Ra’s al-Nāṣirī al-Mu’askarī,” *Al-Majallah al-Jazā’iriyyah li-l-Makḥṭūṭāt* 5, no. 6 (2009). It describes the manuscript and its author and sees in it a distillation of earlier commentaries together with views of the author’s own.⁶
2. ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-‘Isāwī, “Juhūd ‘Ulamā’ al-Jazā’ir fī ‘Ilm al-Tafsīr Zaman al-‘Ahd al-‘Uthmānī,” PhD diss., University of Batna, 2015. Šābirī cites it;⁷ it was not accessible to us.
3. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Būmadyan’s critical edition with a study (master’s thesis, University of Algiers 1, 2016–2017), the edition used here. The editor identifies many of Abū Rās’s sources and remarks of one passage that everything in it “is transmitted from the words of the exegetes; he did no more than compile and arrange.”⁸
4. Taqī al-Dīn Būka‘bar’s edition of the commentary on al-Fātiḥah (2021), which is limited to that sūrah.
5. Nabīl Šābirī, “Kitāb *al-Ibrīz: ‘Arḍ wa-Taḥlīl*,” an article published online by the Tafsir Center for Quranic Studies. It introduces the work and lists its exegetical sources. Among the work’s methodological features, it notes “the absence of digression into reports and anecdotes, as is his habit in his historical works,” and “attention to Isrā’īliyyāt, citing them abundantly for support without comment.”⁹
6. Qādah Šāfah’s doctoral thesis on Qur’anic scholarship in Abū Rās’s works (University of Algiers 1, 2024–2025).
7. The present authors’ study of the rules of exegesis (*qawā’id al-tafsīr*) in *al-Ibrīz*, which asks whether Abū Rās repeated his sources’ formulations or selected, weighed and criticised them.
8. The present authors’ study of Abū Rās’s critical corrections (*istidrākāt*) of earlier exegetes in al-Fātiḥah and al-Baqarah, which collects and classifies them and analyses eight cases.

The theoretical framework draws on Malkawī’s book on the methodology of integration, on Minyāwī’s history and critique of the concept,¹⁰ on ‘Alīwī’s study of the Arabic and Sharī‘ah sciences,¹¹ and on Bālī’s reading of al-‘Āmirī’s classification of the sciences.¹²

³ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 317, editor’s note.

⁴ Šābirī, “Kitāb *al-Ibrīz*,” p. 6.

⁵ Šābirī, “Kitāb *al-Ibrīz*,” p. 6.

⁶ See Mūsūdaq, “Makḥṭūṭ *al-Ibrīz*,” p. 202.

⁷ See Šābirī, “Kitāb *al-Ibrīz*,” n. 6.

⁸ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 251, editor’s note.

⁹ Šābirī, “Kitāb *al-Ibrīz*,” pp. 9–11.

¹⁰ Minyāwī, *Aslamat al-Ma‘rifah*, p. 96.

¹¹ ‘Alīwī, “Al-Takāmūl al-Ma‘rifī,” p. 27.

¹² Bālī, “Al-Takāmūl al-Ma‘rifī ‘inda Abī al-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī,” p. 197.

Research gap. The first six studies edit or introduce the text and describe its method in general terms, noting its sources piecemeal in footnotes, without an inventory or a test of the edition's notes. The last two examine the same text from two other angles: exegetical rules and corrections of earlier exegetes. The present study takes up a third angle that they do not address: the entry of knowledge of the world into *tafsīr*. Its cases differ from theirs, and loci they share are only referred to. We found no study that examines a specific commentary against the levels of the integration model, separates by comparison what the exegete originated from what he transmitted, and quantifies the result.

1.5 Structure of the Article

Sections 2 and 3 set out the framework and the method. Section 4 presents the findings and eight cases (questions 1–3), Section 5 discusses them and their educational implications (question 4), and Section 6 concludes, followed by an appendix of the loci.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Integration and Its Levels in Malkawi's Model

The Arabic root *k-m-l* denotes completeness,¹³ and its reciprocal form *takāmul* suggests a completeness that arises when parts act upon one another. Malkawi grounds integration in the unity of knowledge.¹⁴ On this basis he builds a three-level model: integration of the two sources of knowledge, revelation and the world; integration of its two instruments, reason and sense; and integration of sources with instruments.¹⁵ The levels ask, respectively, where a meaning comes from, by which instrument it is established, and whether a datum of revelation meets a datum of the world through reasoning or observation.

2.2 Knowledge of the World (‘*Ulūm al-‘Umrān*)

Ibn Khaldūn made human civilization (*al-‘umrān al-basharī*) the subject of an independent science.¹⁶ Malkawi uses the word more broadly, making the building of civilization the aim of the knowledge to which revelation guides.¹⁷ Within the limits of this study, “knowledge of the world,” also called the sciences of civilization, means **any knowledge whose subject is humankind or nature and which is not derived, in the first place, from the revealed texts**. It includes the history of nations, religions and genealogies; geography; nature and astronomy; the languages of nations as historical facts; and social conditions and customs. Instruments of rational inquiry are included when they operate on reports. Disciplines internal to *tafsīr*, such as grammatical analysis, variant readings and the occasions of revelation as transmitted reports, are excluded.

2.3 Juxtaposition and Integration; Productive and Consumptive Dimensions

Integration is often mistaken for breadth of learning, and Malkawi warns that this is not what the term means.¹⁸ The number of disciplines in a book does not make it integrative. We therefore distinguish two situations:

- **Juxtaposition** is the co-occurrence of statements from two disciplines in one place without either affecting the other. An example is giving two explanations of a natural phenomenon, one metaphysical and one physical, with neither preference nor reconciliation.

- **Integration** occurs when one discipline acts upon another by qualifying, correcting or explaining it, so that the intended meaning is complete only with both.

Malkawi also distinguishes two dimensions of integration. The productive dimension he describes as a critical and creative synthesis.¹⁹ The consumptive dimension consists in using an existing integrative construct to understand a phenomenon or an issue.²⁰ This distinction is especially useful for late commentaries. A late exegete borrows extensively, so the presence of a synthesis in his book is not enough to credit it to him; its origin must be traced.

2.4 Operational Definition and Criteria

In this study, epistemological integration in *tafsīr* means **that a piece of knowledge of the world, or an instrument of reasoning, acts upon the understanding of a verse or upon the evaluation of an opinion about it, so that the intended meaning is incomplete without it**. Each case is assessed by four criteria:

1. **Level:** sources, instruments, or sources with instruments.
2. **Textual voice:** what the text itself displays. It takes three forms: *attributed*, where Abū Rās names his source; *evaluative*, where he explicitly judges a transmitted opinion (e.g. “the correct view is,” “not sound,” “weak,” “not evident”); and *unattributed*, where he neither names nor judges, even if he begins with “I say.”
3. **Originality:** determined by tracing, not by textual voice. A locus is *productive* if it is absent, in wording and meaning, from the earlier sources examined, and *consumptive* if it is found there.
4. **Completeness:** integration is *complete* when each side is tested by the verification method of its own discipline, *incomplete* when one side is neglected (e.g. a report about civilization accepted merely because it is transmitted), and *harmonising* when it aims to remove an apparent conflict between text and reality.

¹³ See Ibn Fāris, *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, vol. 5, p. 139.

¹⁴ See Malkawi, *Manhajīyyat al-Takāmul al-Ma‘rifī*, p. 27. Cited from the 2nd Arabic edition; English trans. *Epistemological Integration* (2014).

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁶ See Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 1, p. 49.

¹⁷ See Malkawi, *Manhajīyyat al-Takāmul al-Ma‘rifī*, p. 296.

¹⁸ See Malkawi, *Manhajīyyat al-Takāmul al-Ma‘rifī*, pp. 23, 291.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 26.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and Corpus

The study follows a descriptive-analytical design. The inventory is an inductive reading of the text, the cases are examined through content analysis, and sources are traced through textual comparison. The corpus is the edited text of *al-Ibrīz* (pp. 196–347) in Būmadyan's edition. Its page images are available, and its notes identify many sources that can serve as hypotheses. Būka'bar's edition covers only *al-Fātiḥah*, which contains none of the inventoried loci. Every passage of Abū Rās quoted here is taken from the image of the printed page; textual defects are marked [sic] and explained. The Qur'anic text in *al-Ibrīz* follows the reading of Nāfi', as Abū Rās states more than once.²¹ Verses are cited here by the standard Kufan numbering.

3.2 Inventory Procedure

The commentary on the verses (pp. 212–347) was read in full. The author's introduction (pp. 196–211) was excluded because it concerns the history of the Qur'anic sciences rather than the interpretation of verses. The unit of analysis is a **locus in the commentary on a verse where a piece of knowledge of the world or an instrument of reasoning enters**. Where several distinct kinds of knowledge occur under one verse, each is counted separately. Each locus was coded for field, level and textual voice. Loci belonging to the revealed sciences (law and creed) that touch on such knowledge were counted but not analysed. The loci are listed in the appendix; all figures were computed by script from the inventory table.

3.3 Source Tracing and Indicators of Borrowing

The sources of seventeen loci were traced: the loci of the eight cases and those needed to understand them. Each was compared with the commentaries that Abū Rās or the editor names as sources: al-Bayḍāwī's (d. 685 AH/1286 CE) *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, Ibn Juzayy's (d. 741 AH/1340 CE) *al-Tashīl*, the *Jalālayn*, and Ibn 'Aṭīyyah's (d. 542 AH/1147 CE) *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz*. Each was also compared with Ibn Khaldūn's history, and then searched for more widely in digital libraries of the Islamic heritage.

Borrowing is inferred from three indicators, any one of which suffices when strong:

- agreement in consecutive sentences rather than scattered words;
- the same sequence of parts;
- Abū Rās naming his source.

The editor's notes are treated as hypotheses to be tested, not as established results. Where no earlier wording was found, the passage is credited to Abū Rās only within the limits of what was searched. Absence from the available libraries does not prove that no one wrote it before him.

3.4 Selection of Cases

Eight cases were selected purposively from the inventory on two conditions: that they cover the three levels and the three textual voices, and that tracing affects the judgment on them. Loci centred on law or creed were excluded, as were loci already studied in the authors' two earlier articles listed in Section 1.4. The cases do not claim statistical representativeness; the inventory itself carries the quantitative judgment.

4. Findings

4.1 Results of the Inventory and Source Tracing

The inventory identified 72 loci. Four belong to the revealed sciences (three in law and one in creed). In the remaining 68, knowledge of the world or an instrument of reasoning enters the commentary, and the percentages below are calculated on these.

Table 1: Distribution of loci of knowledge of the world by field (n = 68)

Field	n	%
History of nations, religions, genealogies and the Prophet's biography	31	45.6
Geography and places	9	13.2
Society, customs and civilization	9	13.2
Instruments of rational and critical inquiry	7	10.3
Nature and astronomy	6	8.8
Languages of nations as historical facts	6	8.8

Table 2: Loci by level and textual voice (n = 68)

Level	Unattributed	Evaluative	Attributed	Total
Sources (revelation and the world)	43	6	5	54 (79.4%)
Instruments (reason and sense)	4	2	1	7 (10.3%)
Sources with instruments	5	1	1	7 (10.3%)
Total	52 (76.5%)	9 (13.2%)	7 (10.3%)	68

Of the seventeen traced loci, eleven of the twelve unattributed ones were found in earlier works, verbatim or nearly so. Of the three evaluative loci, the substance of one judgment was found in Ibn Khaldūn, the material of another was found there except for one explanation, and the third was not found. Of the two attributed loci, one was found in the named source and the other in a different source.

²¹ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 282.

4.2 Level One: Revelation and the World (History, Religions, Genealogy)

Case 1: “Christians” and “Sabians” between Etymology and History (Qur’an 2:62, al-Baqarah)

Text. Abū Rās writes: “*Al-naṣārā* is the plural of *naṣrānī*. They were so named after al-Nāṣirah [Nazareth], the village where Jesus lived, one of the villages of Syria, when he returned from Egypt with his mother. The *yā* in *naṣrānī* is intensive. It means that this religion was not among a kin group (*‘iṣābah*) of its founder; it is the religion of whoever among his followers supports it. For the Romans adopted it, and they were Magians, with no group solidarity (*‘aṣabiyyah*) [the print has *‘aṣībah*, sic] between them and the Messiah.”²² He then recounts the disciples and how the Romans called the Messiah’s followers “Christians, after the village.” He describes the conversion of Constantine and his mother Helena “in the year 328 after the raising of Jesus,” and says Constantine built Constantinople, which “was a village called Barnīṭah.” He concludes: “From this you know what is wrong in al-Bayḍāwī’s statement, ‘they were with him in a village...’”²³ On the Sabians he writes that they were “attributed to Ṣābī b. Lāmak,” took up “the science of the stars and drawing down their spiritual forces,” and that “Abū Ishāq al-Ṣābī, the vizier of the Buyids, wrote a book on their lineage and religion... They have perished and their trace has vanished.”²⁴

Comparison. The derivation from Nazareth and the intensive sense are in Ibn Khaldūn’s wording: “As for its attribution to Naṣrān, it is an intensive form, and it means that this religion was not among a kin group; it is the religion of whoever among his followers supports it.”²⁵ The editor had already pointed to this source.²⁶ The Sabian material is also Ibn Khaldūn’s. He says “their creed concerned the stars... and drawing down their spiritual forces,” that “Abū Ishāq al-Ṣābī, the scribe, wrote a treatise on their genealogies and creed,” and that “they have vanished and their trace has ceased.”²⁷ He also derives them from “Ṣābī b. Lāmak, the brother of Noah.”²⁸ The Constantine account is assembled from three pages of Ibn Khaldūn, each supplying a different detail:

- The date “328 after the birth of the Messiah” refers there to Helena’s building of churches in Jerusalem, not to her son’s conversion.²⁹

- Ibn Khaldūn writes that “Constantine ordered the renewal of the city of Byzantium and named it Constantinople after himself.”³⁰

- Citing Orosius, he says that “Constantine son of Constantius followed the Magian religion.”³¹

The view Abū Rās criticises is al-Bayḍāwī’s: “or because they were with him in a village called Naṣrān or Nāṣirah, and were named after it.”³²

Analysis. The material of this locus is wholly Khaldūnian and unacknowledged. Abū Rās was not a mere transmitter, however, in three respects:

- **Explanation.** Ibn Khaldūn’s phrase “not among a kin group” is terse. Abū Rās explains it: the Romans adopted the religion although they were Magians, and no *‘aṣabiyyah* bound them to the Messiah. He thus brings *‘aṣabiyyah*, a central concept of Khaldūnian social theory, to bear on a Qur’anic word. We found this explanation nowhere else. Its material may come from Ibn Khaldūn’s remark that Constantine was a Magian (vol. 2, p. 253), which Abū Rās joined to the phrase on vol. 2, p. 251.

- **Criticism.** He uses the historical account against al-Bayḍāwī. The name was given later by the Romans after the Messiah’s village, not because his followers lived with him there. History here corrects an exegetical opinion.

- **Adaptation.** He turns the date of the churches into the date of Constantine’s conversion and replaces “birth of the Messiah” with “raising of Jesus.” He also changes Abū Ishāq al-Ṣābī’s title from “scribe” to “vizier of the Buyids.” “Barnīṭah” is most probably a corruption of “Byzantium” (*Bīzanṭīyah*) in Ibn Khaldūn’s text. This resolves the editor’s difficulty: he suggested it was an old name for Rome and found no evidence for it.³³

Judgment. This is complete integration at the level of sources. Its function is to interpret a Qur’anic term through the history of what it names, and to criticise an opinion about it. The material is consumptive, borrowed unacknowledged from Ibn Khaldūn. The explanation of *‘iṣābah* through *‘aṣabiyyah* and the use of history to criticise al-Bayḍāwī are productive moments. The handling of dates requires correction.

Case 2: Moses’ Pharaoh: ‘Ād or the Amalekites? (Qur’an 2:49, al-Baqarah)

Text. After naming Moses’ Pharaoh, Abū Rās writes: “Al-Bayḍāwī’s statement ‘of the remnants of ‘Ād’: the correct view is ‘of the Amalekites.’ It is also said that he was not of royal descent. As for ‘Ād, they all perished; God Most High says: ‘Do you see any remnant of them?’ (Qur’an 69:8, al-Ḥāqqah).”³⁴

²² Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 280.

²³ Ibid., pp. 281–282.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 282–283.

²⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 2, p. 251.

²⁶ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 280, editor’s note.

²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 2, p. 6.

²⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 7.

²⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 252.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 253.

³² Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 84.

³³ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 281, editor’s note.

³⁴ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 270.

Comparison. *Anwār al-Tanzīl* contains two statements in tension. It says that “Pharaoh is a title for whoever ruled the Amalekites, like Chosroes and Caesar for the kings of Persia and Rome.” It then says that “Moses’ Pharaoh was Muṣ‘ab b. Rayyān, or, it is said, his son Walīd, of the remnants of ‘Ād.”³⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, discussing the Amalekites, writes that “the Pharaohs in Egypt were of them.”³⁶ On Moses’ Pharaoh he writes: “The people of reports mention that he was al-Walīd b. Muṣ‘ab, and that he was a carpenter not of the royal house.”³⁷

Analysis. In form, the correction is Abū Rās’s own judgment, but its substance is in Ibn Khaldūn. Both the Amalekite origin of the Pharaohs and the statement that this Pharaoh was “not of the royal house” are in the *Ibar*, and “it is also said that he was not of royal descent” echoes the latter. Abū Rās’s contribution lies in three things:

- he noticed the tension between al-Bayḍāwī’s two statements and judged the second by the first;
- he applied historical genealogy to the correction;
- he supported it with Qur’anic evidence that ‘Ād perished entirely.

Both sources — the historian’s report and the revealed text — thus meet in this locus to criticise an exegetical opinion.

Judgment. This is complete integration at the level of sources: productive in its application and argument, consumptive in its historical material. The editor referred to Ibn Khaldūn for Pharaoh’s name and noted that the correction is Abū Rās’s own judgment after reviewing the exegetes.³⁸ Tracing adds that the substance of the correction is itself found in Ibn Khaldūn.

Case 3: The *Asbāt* and the Arab Tribes: When Attribution Does Not Reveal the Source (Qur’an 2:136, al-Baqarah)

Text. “Ibn Khaldūn said: the *asbāt* among the Children of Israel are like the tribes among the Arabs.”³⁹

Comparison. The sentence was not found in the *Ibar*, either in its wording or under the word *asbāt*, after a search of the whole work in the edition used. It was found verbatim in Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah’s commentary on “Each people knew its drinking place” (Qur’an 2:60, al-Baqarah): “because the *asbāt* among the Children of Israel are like the tribes among the Arabs.”⁴⁰ Later exegetes then repeated it.

Analysis. The sentence is a comparison between two social systems. It makes the tribal structure of the Children of Israel intelligible to an Arab reader through something familiar. It resembles the comparisons common in Ibn Khaldūn, but its wording is Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah’s. Its absence from the *Ibar* cannot be asserted absolutely, since editions differ. It is certain, however, that it existed in the commentaries before Ibn Khaldūn.

Judgment. This is integration at the level of sources through analogy, and it is consumptive. Its methodological lesson is that **an explicit attribution does not dispense with tracing**. The editor’s note referring to Ibn Khaldūn’s history also needs revision.⁴¹

4.3 Language as Historical Fact

Case 4: “Israel” and “Gabriel” between the Historian and the Exegete (Qur’an 2:40, 98, al-Baqarah)

Text. On “O Children of Israel” (Qur’an 2:40) Abū Rās writes: “Isrā’īl is the title of Jacob, and it means ‘Abd Allāh [servant of God]; *īl* means servant, what precedes it is one of the names of God, and in the language of non-Arabs the governing noun always comes last, the reverse of Arabic.”⁴² On Gabriel and Michael (Qur’an 2:98) he relays from ‘Ikrimah that *jabr*, *mīk* and *isrāf* mean servant and that *īl* means God. He then comments: “This somewhat contradicts what we said earlier about Isrāfīl [sic: Isrā’īl]. Al-Khafājī has: ‘It is Hebrew or Syriac, meaning ‘Abd Allāh according to the sounder view; *īl* is the name of God in their language, not “servant.”’”⁴³ Earlier he had cited, by name, al-Matbūlī’s account that Adam spoke Arabic, then Syriac, and that Arabic “continued among his descendants until the tongues were confused after the Flood.”⁴⁴

Comparison. The first view is in Ibn Khaldūn’s wording: “*īl* for them is a word synonymous with servant, and what precedes it is one of the names of God [Mighty and Majestic] and His attributes, and the governing noun always comes last in the language of non-Arabs.”⁴⁵ Abū Rās does not name him, and he adds “the reverse of Arabic.”

Analysis. Language serves here as historical evidence: the structure of the genitive construction in non-Arab languages is used to establish the meaning of a Qur’anic name. Abū Rās took the first view from a historian and the second from exegetes and commentators, and the two conflict over the meaning of *īl*. To his credit, he noticed the conflict fifty pages later and stated it, which shows critical attention to his material. He resolved it, however, by relaying al-Khafājī’s preference (“according to the sounder view”). He neither returned to correct the earlier passage nor applied a linguistic criterion to decide between the two views.

Judgment. This is integration at the level of sources between exegesis and historical-linguistic knowledge, consumptive in its material. It shows critical awareness of the conflict, but the preference rests on transmission rather than inquiry.

³⁵ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 79.

³⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 2, p. 30.

³⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 31.

³⁸ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 270, editor’s note.

³⁹ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 346.

⁴⁰ Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, *Al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz*, vol. 1, p. 152.

⁴¹ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 346, editor’s note.

⁴² Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 263.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 313.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 256.

⁴⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 2, p. 92.

4.4 Level Two: Instruments (Reason Acting on Reports)

Case 5: The Angels' Analogy and the Criterion of Reasoning in Reading the Torah (Qur'an 2:30, 121, al-Baqarah)

First text. Abū Rās relays from the *Jalālayn* that corruption and bloodshed on earth had occurred “as the children of the jinn did when they inhabited it.”⁴⁶ He then writes: “If it is asked how they [the angels] knew of corruption and bloodshed before Adam was created, the answer is: they knew it because God informed them, or because the jinn used to corrupt the earth and shed blood, so they drew an analogy from them to the children of Adam.”⁴⁷

Second text. He relays the objection against those who cite the Torah extensively, and al-Khafājī's reply permitting it to be read “to learn the description of our Prophet in it.” He then writes: “Al-Tūjānī said: if something is found in it that reasoning (*naẓar*) establishes as unaltered, and it serves a legal purpose, there is no harm. This is a fine statement.”⁴⁸

Analysis. In the first text reason acts on a report. The question is rational (how could the angels know what had not yet occurred?), and the second answer is an analogy from the seen to the unseen, built on a transmitted report. We found this question and answer nowhere else, and the editor counted it among Abū Rās's own “touches.”⁴⁹ In the second text, “reasoning” becomes a criterion for accepting material from the scriptures of the People of the Book, under two conditions: that reasoning establishes it as unaltered, and that it serves a legal purpose. The criterion is borrowed. The approving remark after it is ambiguous: it may be Abū Rās's, or the continuation of al-Khafājī's text that he is quoting. Either way, relaying it without comment amounts to endorsement.

Judgment. This is integration at the level of instruments: productive in the first text, consumptive but endorsed in the second. Both belong to one of the least represented levels in the inventory (7 of 68 loci).

4.5 Level Three: Sources with Instruments (Revelation and Nature through Observation)

Case 6: The Nine Spheres and a “Qultu” That Is Not Abū Rās's (Qur'an 2:29, al-Baqarah)

Text. “If it is said that the astronomers who make observations (*aṣḥāb al-arṣād*) have established nine spheres, I say (*qultu*): what they mention is doubtful. And if it is sound, the verse does not deny more; moreover, if the Throne and the Footstool are added, no disagreement remains.” Then: “Notice (*tanbīh*): this verse implies that He created the heaven after the earth, while His saying ‘And after that He spread the earth’ (Qur'an 79:30, al-Nāzi'āt) apparently says the opposite. The answer is that the earth was created before the heaven and spread out afterwards.”⁵⁰

Comparison. The question and answer are in al-Bayḍāwī's wording, including the word “I say”: “If it is said: have not the astronomers established nine spheres? I say: what they mention is doubtful...”⁵¹ The *tanbīh* is a *fā'idah* in Ibn Juzayy. He gives two answers: that the earth “was created before the heaven and spread out afterwards,” and a second concerning the order of narration.⁵² Abū Rās renamed the heading and kept only the first answer. The editor had identified both sources.⁵³ Al-Bayḍāwī's answer had a later reception: al-Mar'ashī (d. 1145 AH/1732 CE) cited it as evidence that the astronomers' statements are “conjectural.”⁵⁴

Analysis. This is the clearest instance of the third level. A datum of revelation (seven heavens) meets a datum of observation (nine spheres), and the answer proceeds in three steps. First it casts doubt on the observational datum. Then it concedes, for argument's sake, that the verse does not exclude more. Finally it reconciles the two by adding the Throne and the Footstool. This harmonisation gives priority to the text while leaving room to accept what does not contradict it. The whole answer, however, is al-Bayḍāwī's, and the word “I say” came with it; judged by textual voice alone, it would be wrongly credited to Abū Rās.

Judgment. This is harmonising integration at the level of sources with instruments, and it is entirely consumptive. Its methodological lesson is that **the formula “I say” in a late commentary does not prove authorship.**

Case 7: “Until Now”: An Inherited Updating (Qur'an 2:125, al-Baqarah)

Text. “That is, take, O believers, the Station of Abraham, the stone on which he stood when building the House, as a place of prayer; or [he stood on it] when he called people to the pilgrimage, and the trace of his foot is in it until now.”⁵⁵

Comparison. Al-Bayḍāwī has: “The Station of Abraham is the stone bearing the trace of his foot, or the place where the stone was when he stood on it and called people to the pilgrimage, or raised the House; it is its place today.”⁵⁶ The phrase “until now” is in the *Jalālayn*, on “In it are clear signs, the Station of Abraham” (Qur'an 3:97, Āl 'Imrān): “that is, the stone on which he stood when building the House; his feet left their trace in it, and it has remained until now despite the passage of time.”⁵⁷

Analysis. “Until now” is a temporal testimony from observation, linking the Qur'anic report to the visible world. Here, however, it is someone else's testimony, carried over with the borrowed text: its “now” is al-Suyūṭī's, not Abū Rās's. His

⁴⁶ Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 255.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 335.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 255, editor's note.

⁵⁰ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 253.

⁵¹ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 66.

⁵² Ibn Juzayy, *Al-Tashīl*, vol. 1, p. 297.

⁵³ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 253, editor's note.

⁵⁴ Al-Mar'ashī, *Tartīb al-'Ulūm*, p. 227.

⁵⁵ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 339.

⁵⁶ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 105.

⁵⁷ Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, p. 80.

remark on manna is different. He says it “exists until now in the environs of Gaza in the land of Syria,”⁵⁸ and we found this wording nowhere else. The editor noted that it is not found “in the words of the exegetes on whom he relied.”⁵⁹

Judgment. This is integration at the level of sources with instruments (revealed report and observation), and it is consumptive. Its lesson is that **an updating embedded in borrowed text does not belong to the borrower**. In teaching, it calls for the question: whose “now” is this?

4.6 The Limits of Integration

Case 8: Numbers and Places: The Transmitter’s Criterion versus the Historian’s (Qur’an 2:36, 60, 126, al-Baqarah) Texts. On the springs from the rock, Abū Rās writes: “They were six hundred and seventy thousand, and the extent of the *‘ushr* [sic: camp] was twelve miles, each tribe in a mile.”⁶⁰ Elsewhere: “It is reported that Adam descended at Sarandīb, a mountain in India, Eve at Jeddah, and Iblīs at al-Ubullah.”⁶¹ On Abraham’s prayer for Mecca he writes: “He did so by moving al-Ṭā’if to it from Syria and from Ṣan‘ā’, for it had neither crops nor water.”⁶²

Comparison.

- **The number and the extent** are in al-Bayḍāwī: “They were six hundred thousand, and the extent of the camp was twelve miles.”⁶³ Abū Rās added “and seventy thousand,” and the editor noted that this addition is not found in the exegetes from whom he borrowed.⁶⁴ From the same page Abū Rās omitted al-Bayḍāwī’s natural argument for the possibility of the miracle, drawn from a stone that “attracts iron.”⁶⁵

- **The Sarandīb report** is in Ibn Juzayy’s wording: “It is reported that Adam descended at Sarandīb in India, Eve at Jeddah, and Iblīs at al-Ubullah.”⁶⁶ It is not from Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, as the editor states.⁶⁷

- **The al-Ṭā’if report** is in the *Jalālayn*: “He did so by moving al-Ṭā’if from Syria to it, for it was barren, with neither crops nor water.”⁶⁸ Abū Rās added “and from Ṣan‘ā’.”

Analysis. These are reports about civilization (numbers, distances and places) accepted by the criterion of transmission alone. The comparison here is not with a modern standard but with the standard of the very source Abū Rās relied on. Ibn Khaldūn names “the counting of numbers” among the occasions on which exegetes err.⁶⁹ He illustrates it with this very figure, criticising the report that the army of the Children of Israel numbered “six hundred thousand or more, overlooking the capacity of Egypt and Syria to hold such a number of troops.”⁷⁰ Abū Rās thus took from Ibn Khaldūn his reports on the Christians, Sabians, Amalekites and Israel, but not his criterion at this point; he even enlarged the figure. In the Sarandīb report he kept the passive “it is reported” (*ruwiya*), which signals weakness to transmitters, but that is not a test of plausibility.

Judgment. This is incomplete integration. The criterion of transmission is applied, but not the civilizational criterion that the exegete knew from an author he followed. It qualifies the historical sense shown in Cases 1 and 2. On the whole it agrees with Ṣābirī’s description of Abū Rās citing Isrā’īliyyāt for support without comment.⁷¹

5. Discussion

5.1 The Findings in Light of the Criteria

Table 3: The cases by level, voice, tracing and judgment

Case	Level	Textual voice	Tracing result	Judgment
1. Christians and Sabians	Sources	Evaluative + unattributed	Ibn Khaldūn (2:6–7, 251–253), except the <i>‘asabiyyah</i> explanation	Complete; consumptive material, productive explanation and criticism
2. Pharaoh and the Amalekites	Sources	Evaluative	Substance in Ibn Khaldūn (2:30–31)	Complete; productive application
3. The <i>asbāṭ</i>	Sources	Attributed	Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah (1:152), not the named source	Consumptive; misattributed
4. Israel and Gabriel	Sources	Unattributed + attributed	Ibn Khaldūn (2:92); ‘Ikrimah and al-Khaḥājī	Consumptive; conflict noticed
5. Angels’ analogy; criterion of reasoning	Instruments	Unattributed; attributed and approved	Not found; al-Khaḥājī and al-Tūjānī	Productive; consumptive but endorsed

⁵⁸ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 274.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 274, editor’s note.

⁶⁰ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 276.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 261.

⁶² Ibid., p. 340.

⁶³ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 83.

⁶⁴ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 276, editor’s note.

⁶⁵ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 83.

⁶⁶ Ibn Juzayy, *Al-Tashīl*, vol. 1, p. 303.

⁶⁷ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 261, editor’s note.

⁶⁸ Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, p. 26.

⁶⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 1, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 14.

⁷¹ Ṣābirī, “*Kitāb al-Ibrīz*,” p. 11.

Case	Level	Textual voice	Tracing result	Judgment
6. The spheres	Sources with instruments	Unattributed, with “I say”	Al-Bayḍāwī (1:66); Ibn Juzayy (1:297)	Harmonising; consumptive
7. “Until now”	Sources with instruments	Unattributed	Al-Bayḍāwī (1:105); <i>Jalālayn</i> (p. 80)	Consumptive; inherited updating
8. Numbers and places	Sources	Unattributed	Al-Bayḍāwī (1:83); Ibn Juzayy (1:303); <i>Jalālayn</i> (p. 26)	Incomplete

Levels. The dominance of the level of sources (79.4%) and of history (45.6%) fits both the edited portion, dominated by the account of the Children of Israel, and the author’s profile as a historian. The other two levels are narrow: reason appears mainly as analogy in answering difficulties (Case 5), and sense as borrowed observation (Cases 6–7). Juxtaposition also occurs: Abū Rās explains thunder as “the angel in charge of it, or, it is said, his voice.” He then relays from al-Bayḍāwī that “the well-known view is that it is caused by the agitation and collision of the bodies of clouds when driven by the wind,” with neither reconciliation nor preference.⁷²

Dimensions. The consumptive dimension predominates. Eleven of the twelve unattributed loci traced were found in earlier works, most often al-Bayḍāwī, then Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Juzayy and the *Jalālayn*. Even the most penetrating social observations in the book are borrowed:

- Abū Rās explains differences among revealed laws in matters of detail “by the differences of the ages.”⁷³ This is al-Bayḍāwī’s “by the differences of the ages in [their] interests.”⁷⁴

- His remark that “were it not for fools, the world would fall into ruin” comes with a reference to al-Bayḍāwī.⁷⁵

Abū Rās nevertheless has productive moments, and all of them occur where he judges, explains or reasons by analogy:

- the explanation of *‘iṣābah* (Case 1);

- the historical criticism of al-Bayḍāwī (Cases 1 and 2);

- the angels’ analogy (Case 5);

- his identification of the two parties in “The Jews say the Christians have nothing to stand on” (Qur’an 2:113, al-Baqarah) against al-Suyūṭī.

In the last of these he judged al-Suyūṭī’s statement, “the one in the right will enter Paradise and the one in the wrong will enter the Fire,” to be “not evident. For this concerns the Christians of Najrān... and the rabbis of Medina..., and the statement of each party was false; none of them was in the right.”⁷⁶ We found this criticism nowhere else. His productivity thus lies in judging transmitted material through historical knowledge, not in gathering that knowledge.

Textual voice. Tracing shows that textual voice alone cannot establish originality, in three ways:

- an unattributed passage may be borrowed verbatim (Case 6);

- an attributed passage may name the wrong author (Case 3);

- “I say” may not be the author’s own.

This methodological finding extends beyond Abū Rās to the reading of late commentaries, where unattributed borrowing is common.

5.2 Comparison with Previous Studies and the Edition’s Notes

The editor’s judgment. The findings support the editor’s view that much of the text is compiled from the exegetes and his observation that Abū Rās habitually took historical reports from Ibn Khaldūn.⁷⁷ They add that he usually did so without acknowledgment and that his compilation was not devoid of judgment and criticism. They also correct the notes in three places:

- The Sarandīb report comes from Ibn Juzayy, not Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah.

- The editor judged the phrase “may your life last a thousand Nawrūz and Mihrajān festivals” to be “not found in the books of *tafsīr*.”⁷⁸ Its meaning is in al-Tha‘labī (d. 427 AH/1035 CE): “The exegetes said: it is the greeting of the Magians among themselves: live a thousand years, and every thousand Nawrūz and Mihrajān.”⁷⁹

- “Barnīṭah” is most probably Byzantium, as shown above.

The reference of the *asbāt* statement to Ibn Khaldūn needs revision.

Šābirī’s study. The findings agree with his observation that Abū Rās does not digress into reports and anecdotes, as far as form is concerned. History in *al-Ibrīz* enters as brief comments serving the verse, not as independent digressions as in his historical works. In substance, however, history is pervasive, accounting for nearly half the loci. The findings also add Ibn Khaldūn’s history to the exegetical sources Šābirī lists, as a major non-exegetical source. Finally, his description of

⁷² Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, pp. 236–237.

⁷³ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 264.

⁷⁴ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 76.

⁷⁵ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 341; al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 106.

⁷⁶ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 327.

⁷⁷ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 317, editor’s note.

⁷⁸ Abū Rās, *Al-Ibrīz*, p. 311, editor’s note.

⁷⁹ Al-Tha‘labī, *Al-Kashf wa-l-Bayān*, vol. 3, p. 454.

Abū Rās citing Isrā'īliyyāt “without comment” holds for numbers and places. It needs qualification, though, by the loci where Abū Rās judged the reports, as with Pharaoh and the Christians.

The earlier prediction. Sa'd Allāh, before seeing the work, predicted that it “would be stuffed with digressions such as reports, grammatical analysis, anecdotes and the like.”⁸⁰ Reports are indeed abundant, but they serve the meaning, and no judgment on them is sound before they are traced.

5.3 Educational Implications for Teaching *Tafsīr*

1. **Tracing an exegete's sources is a teachable skill.** The cases can serve as exercises: students trace an unattributed passage to its origin and assess what the exegete added, omitted or changed, learning that a late exegete's merit appears in comparison with his source.

2. **Attribution and “I say” are indications, not proofs.** Students should be trained not to judge originality by wording and to test even explicit attributions, as the *asbāt* and the spheres show.

3. **Each report has its own criterion of verification.** Reports about numbers, places and nations are tested both by transmission and by civilizational plausibility, a criterion rooted in the Islamic tradition itself, as Ibn Khaldūn's critique of the exegetes shows.

4. **Updating with awareness.** At every “until now,” students should ask whose time is meant and whether the description still holds, distinguishing the exegete's testimony from his source's.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Results

1. Of the 72 inventoried loci, 68 bring knowledge of the world or an instrument of reasoning into the commentary. History of nations, religions and genealogies is the most frequent field (45.6%), and the level of sources predominates (79.4%).

2. Most loci are unattributed (76.5%). Eleven of the twelve unattributed loci traced were found in earlier works, chiefly those of al-Bayḍāwī, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Juzayy and the *Jalālayn*. Abū Rās's integration is therefore mainly consumptive.

3. Abū Rās's productive moments lie in his judgments, explanations and analogies: the explanation of *'iṣābah* through *'aṣabiyyah*, the historical criticism of al-Bayḍāwī, the angels' analogy, and his criticism of al-Suyūṭī.

4. Textual voice alone does not establish originality. An unattributed passage may be borrowed verbatim, an attributed one may name the wrong author, and “I say” may not be Abū Rās's.

5. The limits of his integration lie in reports about numbers and places, accepted on transmission alone, although Ibn Khaldūn, whose reports Abū Rās used, states the criterion that would have tested them.

6. Tracing corrected the edition's notes in at least three places (Sarandīb, Nawrūz, Barnīṭah), confirmed them in others, and questions the reference of the *asbāt* statement.

Recommendations

1. Revise the notes of the *al-Ibrīz* edition in light of source tracing, and collate its text of al-Fātiḥah with Būka'bar's edition.

2. Apply source tracing to late compilatory commentaries before judging their methods.

3. Include exercises in source tracing and in the criticism of reports about civilization in courses on the methods of the exegetes in faculties of Islamic sciences.

4. Study the influence of Ibn Khaldūn's history on late Maghribi commentaries, both as material and as a criterion.

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Appendix: Loci of Knowledge of the World in *al-Ibrīz wa-l-Iksīr*

Page numbers refer to Būmadyan’s edition. The unit and procedure of the inventory are described in Section 3.2, and the coding criteria in Section 2.4.

Field (n)	Pages
History of nations, religions, genealogies and the Prophet’s biography (31)	222, 229–230, 231, 246, 252, 266, 270 (two loci), 271, 272, 275, 276, 279–280, 280–282, 282–283, 296, 301–302, 305, 311, 312, 314, 316, 317, 324, 326–327, 328, 329, 335, 337, 344, 346
Geography and places (9)	259, 261, 270, 274, 274–275, 277, 284, 339, 340
Society, customs and civilization (9)	245, 264, 265, 290, 311, 315, 329, 338, 341
Instruments of rational and critical inquiry (7)	239–242, 255, 271, 323, 331, 332–333, 335
Nature and astronomy (6)	236–237, 245, 247, 248–249, 253, 256
Languages of nations as historical facts (6)	256, 263, 275, 303, 313, 320
Revealed sciences (counted, not analysed) (4)	283, 291, 318, 330
Total (72)	Knowledge of the world and instruments: 68; revealed sciences: 4